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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Memorandum of Conversation

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DATE: November 24, 1958

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SUBJECT: Berlin

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PARTICIPANTS: The German Ambassador, Mr. Grewe
Mr. Rolf Pauls, Counselor, German Embassy
G - Mr. Murphy
EUR - Mr. Kohler
GER - Mr. Lampson

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G - Mr. Murphy (cc)

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GER - Mr. Hillenbrand (cc)

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GPA - Mr. Lampson (cc)

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Mr. Murphy opened the conversation with some reminiscences about the Berlin Blockade. He said he shared General Clay's view that we should have met the issue of the blockade squarely on the ground. General Clay had urged the dispatch of a combat team to force its way to Berlin. The fact that we did not do this but evaded the issue, in Mr. Murphy's opinion, led to Korea. Mr. Murphy said he felt we must stand firm and move if necessary with force.

Mr. Murphy then asked the German Ambassador for an explanation about the exact nature of the Federal Republic's relations with East Germany. He was not altogether clear about them and recent newspaper reports had confused the subject.

Ambassador Grewe replied that the news reports of the conclusion of a trade agreement between the Federal Republic and East Germany had created a false impression of the situation. The agreement which had been concluded on the 20th was not a significant new development. It was merely the technical renewal of a trade agreement which was renegotiated on an annual basis. It was not an inter-governmental agreement as had been suggested in the American press. The negotiators on the West German side were not officials of a government ministry. They were representatives of the Treuhandstelle which was set up as a clearing agency for interzonal trade but had no official or governmental status. This was done purposely to avoid any impression that the agreements reached with the East German negotiators, who were of course officials of the East German regime, had any implications that the Federal Government was recognizing the GDR. The Ambassador then summarized some of the provisions of the agreement mentioning the

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amounts fixed for various lists of commodities.

The Ambassador then went on to say that the rumor in the newspapers about the existence of a special clause in the agreement regarding traffic to and from Berlin was without basis. There was no specific traffic clause. He had received a telegram from the Foreign Office clarifying this point. According to the interpretation of the West Germans (and they hoped this was also the understanding of the East Germans) one clause in the agreement had referred back to a traffic clause which had been included in the earlier agreements of 1951 and 1952. This clause in the present agreement provided that deliveries of steel should be carried out on condition that the previous conditions were complied with. This was a sort of rebus sic stantibus clause and it did not contain any new element or implication.

Mr. Murphy then pointed out some of the technical difficulties involved in our position on Berlin. It was a little awkward to find ourselves in a position of seeming to insist that the Russians remain in Berlin. To the man in the street this seemed to go against common sense. He could imagine that the Russkies at a later time might throw this in our faces.

Mr. Murphy then asked for the Ambassador's opinion on the philosophy of the present Soviet operation. Smirnov had been very vague in his interview with Chancellor Adenauer. He had spoken of the discontinuance of certain functions. Had he meant all or only some of them? He then went on to say that we do not want to sit statically like wooden images only responding to Soviet initiatives. We had been considering sending a note to the Soviet Union putting them clearly on notice that we would not relinquish our position in Berlin and that we would continue to come and go as before. He said the French had had some reservations about taking such a step arguing that we did not want to seem panicky. They thought we should wait to see whether the Soviets were going to allow the tension to relax, in other words to await their next move. We on the contrary felt strongly that we should take such a step now. The note was a good initiative; it was correct to lay it right on the line.

Mr. Kohler then outlined a thought which he and Mr. Murphy had been discussing before the Ambassador came in. It might be more adroit to state our position on Berlin in the form of a note to the Federal Republic than to the Soviet Union. We have not yet received any direct message on Berlin from Moscow. The Soviets are therefore not thoroughly committed to any course of action. It may be unwise to write them a note which would have the effect of making them freeze their position. For this reason it might be better to address a note to the Federal Republic which would make all the points we wanted to register in Moscow -- a note which the Soviet Union would be informed of --. We could take as a peg the report the Federal Republic made to us about the Smirnov meeting with Adenauer. This visit is the only official diplomatic step which the Kremlin has taken so far. We could reply to the German report with a note informing them of our position on the matter and incorporate in this note all the substance of the note which had been prepared on Friday for possible delivery in Moscow.

Mr. Kohler then went on to say that the Soviets may have overreached themselves a little on Berlin. Khrushchev may have improvised a bit without having

thought through all the implications of his action. It is possible, for example, that he is experiencing a little difficulty with the Poles who may have been troubled by the Soviet repudiation of the Potsdam Agreement which is the basis for their claim to the Oder-Neisse territory.

Mr. Murphy then added that he had a feeling that the Soviet Union may have wished to stir up confusion and tension in Europe because they have been unable to achieve as much in the Middle and Far East as they had hoped but might not want to push things to extremes.

Ambassador Grewe commented that the sending of a note to the Federal Republic would have the advantage of leaving the way open for the Soviet Union to withdraw without great loss of face.

In commenting on the delivery of a message from Prime Minister Macmillan to Khrushchev, Mr. Murphy said he thought Macmillan might be a little embarrassed to find himself isolated in this approach. He thought himself that it was far better for the four Western Powers to coordinate their actions closely so as to give an appearance of complete solidarity. The Soviet Union was continually trying to divide the Western countries and any suggestion of differences between the West could not fail to encourage them. It was for this reason that he had regretted the impression given by newspaper reports on the interzonal trade agreement. It had made it seem that the Federal Republic was following an independent line. He urged the Ambassador to impress upon his Minister the importance which he placed upon the close association and the complete solidarity of the Four Powers in this situation. He said he believed that in the light of all the circumstances it was important for the West to take some positive action. The French might see some advantage to delivering a tripartite note to the Federal Republic on the eve of the De Gaulle visit. This would create a favorable atmosphere for the meeting. He also pointed out that sending a note to the Federal Republic would have the advantage of bringing the Federal Republic into the picture and demonstrating Western solidarity.

Ambassador Grewe then asked whether they had received any indication of what the Secretary thought of the proposal in the Chancellor's letter for a Western Four-Power meeting. Mr. Murphy explained that the Secretary had not yet returned. Mr. Kohler added that we had asked Ambassador Bruce to tell the Chancellor that the Secretary would not be back until Monday afternoon so that an answer could not be expected immediately.

Mr. Murphy then explained his thinking on the subject of a Four Power meeting. He believed it premature to call a meeting at the Foreign Minister level and would personally favor a meeting at the ambassadorial level as a first step. The meeting might be held to advantage in Berlin.

Ambassador Grewe then handed Mr. Murphy a copy of a German memorandum (a translation of which is attached). He drew his attention particularly to Part III after explaining that the earlier parts consisted of a legal study of the Western position in Berlin prepared by the Foreign Office Legal Adviser.

After looking over the memorandum Mr. Murphy said he hoped that the Ambassador would impress upon the Foreign Minister that there was no weakness, shakiness or nervousness in Washington. All the talk about indecision was newspaper speculation. We are not thinking along the lines of compromise at all. These press stories do not represent government thinking. If the Foreign Minister has any doubts on this score the Ambassador should reassure him.

Ambassador Grewe then raised some questions of Mr. Murphy. He referred to his conversation with the Secretary during which Mr. Dulles had mentioned the idea of dealing with GDR personnel as agents of the Soviet Union. He also mentioned the Secretary's reference to Ambassador Beam's talks with the Chinese Ambassador to Poland as carrying with them no element of recognition. Grewe had reported this to Bonn but in doing so had emphasized that this did not represent final U.S. policy but merely the Secretary's thinking out loud. Grewe added that Bonn does not like the idea of recognizing GDR officials as agents.

Mr. Kohler said that we were now reviewing our contingency plans. Our view of the present situation is that the Soviets or the GDR will move against military lines of communication but will not interfere with civilian traffic to Berlin. In 1954 when the agency theory had been accepted this had been on the assumption that the situation we would be faced with would involve a total blockade and the feeding of two and a half million people.

Mr. Murphy then said that in the past we had accepted the theory that in the case of unavoidable police contacts which inevitably occur from time to time we should maintain that the GDR personnel were Soviet agents in order to avoid any question of recognition. He pointed out that the Federal Government went even further in the matter of technical contacts and referred to the Treuhandstelle. Mr. Pauls then expressed the view that making military supply lines subject to GDR inspection was quite a different matter. Mr. Murphy then said we are brought into inevitable contacts with the GDR by virtue of passing through their territory. For example, the personnel on the military trains, the engineer and the trainmen ~~who are running in the Zone~~ are GDR personnel when the trains are running in the Zone.

Grewe then tried to envisage what would occur in a practical situation. If a military train crosses the interzonal border and the GDR officials ask to inspect the train papers the commander of the train has several choices. He can pay no attention and go on. Or he can give his paper to the GDR official protesting that he considers him an agent of the Soviet Union. In the latter case Grewe anticipated that the GDR would soon develop a stamp which would be stamped on the papers stating that the GDR official is not an agent of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the Soviet Union will undoubtedly state that the GDR officials are not agents and such an assertion on the part of the person who is alleged to be the principal will be awkward to deal with. The third possibility will be for the train commander to return to West Germany. In this case it may be necessary to resort to an airlift.

Mr. Murphy said that we didn't like to speculate in too much detail about hypothetical situations. However, he explained that U.S. thinking was not running along the lines of mounting an airlift. Our thinking has not taken final shape

but we do not want to find ourselves again in an airlift situation. We would prefer to push through a convoy along the ground. Grewe asked what would happen if bridges along the route were blown up. Mr. Murphy replied that we would have to move in troops and maintain the highway. This might call for several divisions. Mr. Murphy concluded that we are trying to get away from talking about an airlift. He also said we don't think that the Soviet Union wants to blockade the civilian population. Such a course would run counter to their present efforts to promote German peace treaty negotiations. He also said that he thought it unlikely that the Soviets would be willing to give up their participation in the Berlin Air Safety Center. He thought they were attempting to distract, confuse and divide the West.

The German Ambassador then summarized the conversation as follows:

1. The Department was considering sending a note to the Federal Republic.
2. The Department was inclined to wait for an official Soviet step before holding a Western Four Power conference. (Mr. Murphy said he considered it was premature to hold a conference now. The Secretary's views were not yet known. Murphy favored having it on the ambassadorial level. Grewe expressed the view a meeting in Berlin would be very helpful.)
3. Regarding the memorandum, Grewe had submitted, Mr. Murphy said it seemed to harmonize with our thinking.
4. The U.S. was not thinking along the lines of mounting an airlift but of being firm on land if necessary using force.
5. The U.S. did envisage the possibility of dealings with the GDR under certain circumstances but they would not let them control (i.e. inspect) allied military traffic. Mr. Murphy said we were studying these questions and we could not give any government positions on hypothetical cases. In reply to a question from Grewe whether we would be willing to submit papers to a GDR man at a checkpoint, Mr. Murphy said it was difficult to give a definitive answer to a hypothetical question. It was his personal opinion that if it was quite clear that the GDR person was acting as a Soviet agent it would probably be permissible. It was important however that we make it clear that we have the right of ingress and egress and that we will maintain it.

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